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Bomb Decision Tests Kennedy

STATINTL

Leadership on Ban Question Held Vital After Failure of His Actions on Cuba

The neutron bomb is in the public domain at last.

Detailed descriptions of this new type of nuclear weapon are being published. Senator Dodd of Connecticut has constituted himself the spokesman for those who believe that the secrecy regarding it is not now if it ever was, in the public interest.

The basic reason why the lid is off and cannot be put back on is the failure of the nuclear test ban negotiations at Geneva. The Russians not only refused to negotiate seriously; their arrogant, even patronizing, attitudes convinced the American participants that Russia was already doing what Western scientists had warned was in the realm of the possible.

Congressional observers from the Atomic Energy Committee attended some of the Geneva sessions at the request of President Kennedy to judge for themselves

the value of the reports he was getting. All of them—Democrats and Republicans alike—have been far more reserved in their public comments than Dodd, but they have clearly come down on the side of a renewal of testing.

President Kennedy obviously has to make the final decision. Only he has access to all the information and knows the background of all the problems relating to this latest escapee from Pandora's box.

Almost as important as the decision will be his manner of arriving at it. For him it is a major problem of communication, first with the parties immediately at interest such as the technicians, the military and political experts, his diplomatic advisers and men whose judgment has been tempered by

long experience in decision-making of such magnitude. Then he must handle public opinion, which is never satisfied with anything to which the flavor of kitchen cabinet attaches.

Cuba was a disaster for him not just because it failed; had it succeeded its value was dubious. The charge that clings is that he did not protect the presidency from the consequences of failure. CIA Director Dulles and his deputy, Richard Bissell, are expendable even though they have not yet been expended; but the presidency is not.

Kennedy did not improve on this situation with his own impulsive direction of the prisoners-for-tractors exchange. Now that has fallen flat and it was all too plain early in the game that both Kennedy and Castro have been working toward that end with each taking pains to fix it so that each could blame the other.

This is too pat a business for the presidency and one much more suited to the back room of City Hall. Because of the nature of the Cuban situation, not much can be made of it politically by Republicans, but the damage to the leadership principle remains.

The irony is that Kennedy's advisers write books about just such matters, most of them with great academic brilliance. Apparently the one that beats about with it dazzles them as much as it did as the well-known White House chronicler of the not-so-distant past.

The President does not need to delegate and may not exercise it. He does not need to narrow his role, but to expand it.